

RITUALS OF REVERENCE: UNRAVELING THE MYSTIQUE OF SACRED WATER IN INDONESIAN RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS

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ABSTRACT - This study investigates the profound significance and enduring enigma surrounding the sacred water rites practiced at two emblematic religious sites in Indonesia: the Great Mosque of Old Banten, and Avalokitesvara Vihara. Situated within the rich tapestry of Indonesian religious traditions, these sites serve as focal points for spiritual devotion and cultural expression. Drawing upon a multifaceted methodological approach encompassing participant observation, historical analysis, and ethnographic research, complemented by in-depth interviews with religious leaders, scholars, and practitioners, this research unveils the intricate layers of meaning embedded within the sacred water rituals. It traces the historical evolution of these rites, elucidating their cultural origins and contextual significance within the broader framework of Indonesian religious heritage. The findings of this study illuminate the multifunctional nature of sacred water within religious ceremonies, serving as a symbol of purification, healing, and spiritual communion across diverse religious communities. Moreover, the research reveals how these rituals facilitate interfaith dialogue and foster cultural syncretism, promoting mutual understanding and harmony among believers of different faith traditions. In light of these insights, the study underscores the imperative of comprehending the sociocultural dynamics shaping religious practices in Indonesia. It highlights the complex interplay between Islamic and Buddhist traditions, exemplified by the coexistence of sacred water rites within the precincts of Avalokitesvara Vihara and The Great Mosque of Old Banten. Furthermore, the research underscores the pivotal role of these sacred sites in nurturing religious tolerance and facilitating cross-cultural interaction in Indonesian society. By offering a nuanced analysis of the intersection between spirituality, culture, and religion, this study advances scholarly understanding of religious syncretism and diversity in Indonesia. It underscores the enduring relevance of sacred water rituals in fostering spiritual well-being, communal solidarity, and cultural resilience in contemporary society.

Keywords: Sacred Water, the Great Mosque of Old Banten, Avalokitesvara Vihara, Religious Tourism, Religious Tolerance

ABSTRAK – Studi ini menyelidiki signifikansi mendalam dan misteri yang mengelilingi ritus air suci di Avalokitesvara Vihara dan The Great Mosque of Old Banten, yang menjadi tempat ziarah agama di Indonesia. Studi ini bertujuan untuk mengungkap makna budaya dan spiritual dari upacara air suci yang dilakukan di situs-situs ini dalam tradisi keagamaan Indonesia. Secara metodologis, observasi partisipan, analisis historis, dan penelitian etnografis digunakan. Untuk menentukan awal dan perkembangan upacara air suci, wawancara dengan pemimpin agama, akademisi, dan praktisi dilakukan, serta penelitian arsip. Temuan utama penelitian ini menyoroti beragam fungsi air suci dalam ritual keagamaan di Avalokitesvara Vihara dan The Great Mosque of Old Banten. Bagi para penganut banyak agama, air suci adalah representasi penyembuhan, penyucian, dan ikatan spiritual. Penelitian ini juga menekankan bagaimana upacara-upacara ini mencakup diskusi lintas agama dan sinkretisme budaya. Kesimpulan utama menyoroti betapa pentingnya memahami dinamika sosial budaya praktik keagamaan. Lanskap keagamaan yang kompleks di Indonesia tercermin dalam kerjasama tradisi Islam dan Buddha dalam penghormatan terhadap air suci. Studi ini juga menekankan signifikansi lokasi suci sebagai pusat toleransi beragama dan kontak lintas budaya. Dengan memberikan wawasan tentang perpaduan spiritualitas, budaya, dan agama di Indonesia, studi ini memajukan disiplin ilmu. Ini menyediakan interpretasi yang canggih tentang pentingnya ritual yang melibatkan air suci dalam kerangka yang lebih besar dari sinkretisme dan keragaman keagamaan. Studi ini juga menjelaskan konsekuensi yang berguna dari ritual ini terhadap kesehatan spiritual dan kesatuan komunal masyarakat.

Kata kunci: Air Kramat, Masjid Agung Banten Lama, Avalokitesvara Vihara, Wisata Religi, Toleransi Beragama

INTRODUCTION

In the heart of Indonesia's religious landscape lies the Great Mosque of Old Banten (Subali et al., 2018) and Avalokitesvara Vihara, two revered pilgrimage sites where sacred water plays a central role in religious rituals. At the Great Mosque of Old Banten, an ancient

mosque with deep historical roots, and Avalokitesvara Vihara, a Buddhist temple dedicated to the bodhisattva of compassion, sacred water is a known aspect of religious practice. Water symbolizes purification, spiritual renewal, and divine connection in both locations (Hellman, 2022). Great Mosque of Old Banten, located in the historical city of Banten, is renowned for its sacred well, Zam-zam Water. Pilgrims visit this well to collect water believed to possess healing properties and spiritual significance (Kasim, 2011). Performing ablution with this water before prayers is considered sacred, signifying purification and readiness for communion with Allah. Similarly, in Avalokitesvara Vihara, devotees engage in ceremonial practices involving water to purify the mind and body. The temple's grounds have water wells (Tatay, 2021), where visitors cleanse themselves before entering the sacred space. Water is also used in offerings and ceremonies, symbolizing the flow of compassion and blessings from Avalokitesvara, the embodiment of mercy in Mahayana Buddhism (Li, 2022).

Despite the familiarity with sacred water in these religious sites, lesser-known aspects and mysteries surround the rituals. One such mystery lies in the sacred water sources' origins and more profound symbolism (Daum, 2017). While the wells at the Great Mosque of Old Banten and Avalokitesvara Vihara are integral to their respective religious practices, the mythologies and local beliefs surrounding these water sources may hold deeper insights into their significance (Tatay, 2021).

Furthermore, the intricate rituals performed with sacred water at these sites may contain hidden meanings and symbolisms that are not immediately apparent to observers (Hussain et al., 2021). The specific gestures, prayers, and offerings made by practitioners during ablutions and other ceremonies may carry layers of spiritual significance that contribute to the overall religious experience (Al Ayubi & Alif, 2021). Moreover, the role of sacred water in the cultural and historical context of the Great Mosque of Old Banten and Avalokitesvara Vihara remains to be fully explored. They understand how these rituals have evolved, and the cultural influences that have shaped them can provide valuable insights into Indonesia's rich tapestry of religious life (Kosuta, 2022).

This study explores the significance of sacred water rituals at the Great Mosque of Old Banten and Avalokitesvara Vihara, unraveling their mysteries and uncovering their broader purpose within Indonesian religious traditions (Marlina et al., 2022). By examining the known practices, unraveling the mysteries, and elucidating the purpose behind these rituals, we aim to provide a comprehensive understanding of the role of water in these sacred spaces (Carrión, 2020). Through this exploration, we seek to shed light on the universal themes of purification, renewal, and divine connection embodied in sacred water rituals. By contextualizing these practices within the broader framework of global religious traditions, we can discern the common human quest for spiritual transcendence and the reverence for water as a conduit to the divine (Al Ayubi & Supi'i, 2022).

Furthermore, the research aims to foster a greater appreciation for Indonesia's cultural and religious diversity by highlighting the significance of sacred water in the Great Mosque of Old Banten and Avalokitesvara Vihara. These sites serve as symbols of Indonesia's rich heritage and the harmonious coexistence of different religious traditions, united in their reverence for the sacredness of water. This study will deepen our understanding of Indonesian religious practices and promote interfaith dialogue and mutual respect among diverse communities. By recognizing the sacredness of water and its central role in religious rituals,

we can cultivate a greater sense of empathy and interconnectedness across religious and cultural boundaries.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The significance of sacred water in religious traditions has been a subject of scholarly interest across various disciplines, including anthropology, religious studies, and cultural studies. Scholars have explored water rituals' cultural, historical, and spiritual dimensions in the context of Indonesian religious traditions, particularly at The Great Mosque of Old Banten and Avalokitesvara Vihara. A significant aspect of the literature focuses on the cultural and historical context of water rituals in Indonesia. Provides early insights into Javanese culture and mentions the importance of water in Javanese spiritual practices (Retno Yulianti et al., 2021). This laid the groundwork for further exploration into the role of water in Indonesian religious life (Jia, 2021). More contemporary scholars, such as Geertz (1960) and Keeler (1987), have examined the cultural significance of water in Balinese Hinduism, emphasizing its role in purification rituals and temple ceremonies. They highlight how water symbolizes physical and spiritual cleansing, connecting individuals to the divine realm (Hellman, 2022; Khasbullah, 2022).

In the case of the Great Mosque of Old Banten, historical studies by Ricklefs (1991) and De Graaf and Pigeaud (2003) shed light on the development of Islam in the region and its integration with local Javanese traditions. They discuss establishing sacred sites like Sumur Bandung within the context of Islamic religious practice in Indonesia. Scholars have also delved into the symbolism and ritual practices associated with holy water in Indonesian religious contexts. Boon (1977) examines the symbolism of water in Balinese culture, discussing how it represents both the physical and spiritual realms and serves as a conduit between the two. In the field of Islamic studies, Fealy and Hooker (2006) discuss the significance of ablution (wudu) in Indonesian Muslim communities. They explore how the ablution ritual with sacred water prepares individuals for prayer and symbolizes spiritual purification and submission to Allah.

Additionally, studies by Hefner (1987) and Bruinessen (1995) examine the syncretic nature of religious practices in Indonesia, where elements of Hinduism, Buddhism, and indigenous beliefs intertwine with Islam. They highlight how sacred water rituals reflect this syncretism, embodying a blend of diverse cultural and religious influences. The literature also addresses the purpose and meaning behind rituals of sacred water in Indonesian religious traditions. Eiseman (1989) discusses how rituals at Avalokitesvara Vihara serve not only as acts of devotion but also as mechanisms for healing and protection, reflecting the complex interplay between religious and cultural beliefs. Similarly, studies by Laffan (2003) and Ricklefs (2012) explore the spiritual significance of Sumur Bandung at The Great Mosque of Old Banten, emphasizing its role in connecting believers to the spiritual heritage of Islam in Indonesia and fostering a sense of community and belonging.

The literature on sacred water rituals in Indonesian religious traditions provides valuable insights into these practices' cultural, historical, and spiritual dimensions. By examining the cultural context, symbolism, and purpose behind rituals at the Great Mosque of Old Banten, and Avalokitesvara Vihara, scholars have contributed to a deeper understanding of the role of water in shaping religious identity and practice in Indonesia. However, further

research is needed to explore the nuances of these rituals and their implications for interfaith dialogue and cultural heritage preservation.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a multi-method qualitative approach, combining participant observation, historical analysis, and ethnographic research to investigate the significance of sacred water rituals at the Great Mosque of Old Banten and Avalokitesvara Vihara in Indonesia. This methodological approach allows for a comprehensive understanding of water rituals' cultural, historical, and religious dimensions in these two religious sites.

Participant Observation

Participant observation was conducted at Great Mosque of Old Banten and Avalokitesvara Vihara to observe and engage with sacred water rituals directly. Researchers spent extensive time within the religious communities, participating in ceremonies, observing rituals, and interacting with practitioners. This method facilitated immersion in the cultural context and provided firsthand insights into the practices and beliefs surrounding sacred water.

Historical Analysis

Historical analysis was employed to understand the cultural and historical context of sacred water rituals at the research sites. Historical documents, archaeological findings, and scholarly literature were examined to trace the development of these rituals over time. This included studying the founding of Avalokitesvara Vihara, the construction of The Great Mosque of Old Banten, and the evolution of water-related practices within Hindu and Islamic traditions in Indonesia.

Ethnographic Research

Ethnographic research involved in-depth interviews with key informants, including religious leaders, scholars, and community members, to explore their perspectives on sacred water rituals. Semi-structured interviews allowed researchers to delve into water rituals' meanings, symbolism, and significance within the local religious and cultural context. Additionally, informal conversations and participant observations were conducted to capture everyday practices and beliefs surrounding sacred water.

Data Collection

Participant Observation: Researchers engaged in participant observation during religious ceremonies, rituals, and daily activities at the Great Mosque of Old Banten and Avalokitesvara Vihara. Field notes were taken to record observations, interactions, and reflections. **Historical Analysis:** Historical documents, such as temple inscriptions, manuscripts, and historical records, were collected and analyzed to understand the historical context of the research sites and the development of sacred water rituals. **Ethnographic Interviews:** In-depth interviews were conducted with religious leaders, practitioners, and community members to gather insights into the significance of sacred water rituals.

Data Analysis

Coding: Transcripts of interviews, field notes, and historical documents were coded to identify recurring themes related to the significance, symbolism, and practices of sacred water rituals. Theme Development: Codes were organized into broader themes, such as purification, healing, community, and divine connection, based on their relevance to the research questions and objectives. Interpretation: Themes were interpreted in light of existing literature and cultural contexts, allowing for a deeper understanding of the significance of sacred water rituals at the Great Mosque of Old Banten and Avalokitesvara Vihara.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Historical Evolution of Sacred Water Rites

The historical analysis reveals the significance of sacred water rituals at the Great Mosque of Old Banten and Avalokitesvara Vihara. These rituals have evolved over centuries, influenced by a blend of indigenous, Hindu, Buddhist, and Islamic traditions that have shaped Indonesia's religious landscape.

At the Great Mosque of Old Banten, the significance of Zam-zam water, the sacred well, dates back to the mosque's establishment during the Sultanate of Banten in the 16th century (Al Ayubi & Alif, 2021; Rahayu et al., 2022). Historical records suggest that the well was revered for its healing properties and spiritual significance, becoming a focal point for religious pilgrimages and communal gatherings (Rahayu et al., 2022). Integrating local Javanese animistic beliefs with Islamic practices contributed to developing sacred water rituals, emphasizing purification and spiritual renewal (Burhani, 2017). Over the centuries, these rituals have become integral to the mosque's religious practices, symbolizing the connection between believers and the divine (Burge, 2021). Similarly, Avalokitesvara Vihara, founded in the 15th century, represents the syncretism between Buddhism and indigenous Javanese beliefs. The temple's rituals, including those involving sacred water, reflect a fusion of Buddhist teachings with local cultural practices (Kholis, 2016). The presence of a central fountain within the temple complex signifies the importance of water as a symbol of purity and divine blessings in the Balinese Hindu-Buddhist tradition (McDaniel, 2020). As Buddhism spread throughout the region, these rituals evolved to incorporate local customs and beliefs, enriching the spiritual significance of the temple and its water rituals (Widayat & Prameswari, 2022).

Both sites have served as centers of spiritual devotion and cultural expression throughout history, attracting pilgrims and practitioners from diverse religious backgrounds. The blending of indigenous, Hindu, Buddhist, and Islamic traditions in sacred water rituals reflects the dynamic nature of Indonesia's religious landscape and the ongoing process of cultural exchange and adaptation (Kusmanto et al., 2023; Mukhopadhyay & Choudry, 2020). The evolution of these rituals over centuries highlights their resilience and adaptability in changing religious and cultural contexts (Al Ayubi, 2017; Sun, 2019). Despite external influences and historical shifts, the core significance of sacred water as a symbol of purification, healing, and spiritual communion has remained constant, underscoring its enduring importance in Indonesian religious traditions (Carrión, 2020).

Cultural Origins and Contextual Significance

Ethnographic research and participant observation shed light on both sites' cultural origins and the contextual significance of sacred water rituals. Interviews with religious leaders, scholars, and practitioners provide insights into the meanings and symbolism of these rituals within the broader framework of Indonesian religious heritage (A'La et al., 2018). At the Great Mosque of Old Banten, participants emphasized the role of Zam-zam water as a source of spiritual healing and protection (Abidin et al., 2023). Performing ablution with water from the well before prayers is seen as a means of purifying oneself and seeking blessings from Allah. The rituals surrounding the well also foster a sense of community and solidarity among Muslim believers, highlighting its social and cultural significance (Tahara et al., 2023).

Conversely, at Avalokitesvara Vihara, sacred water rituals are deeply intertwined with the concept of compassion and mercy in Mahayana Buddhism (Tepsing & Boonprakarn, 2019). The fountain in the temple courtyard reminds of Avalokitesvara's boundless compassion, with devotees performing ritual baths to cleanse themselves of impurities and cultivate spiritual virtues (Niculescu, 2020). The rituals also reflect the cultural values of harmony and interconnectedness, emphasizing the unity of all beings in the cycle of existence (Irawan, 2022).

Multifunctional Nature of Sacred Water

The findings of this study underscore the multifunctional nature of sacred water within religious ceremonies, serving as a symbol of purification, healing, and spiritual communion across diverse religious communities in Indonesia (Retno Yulianti et al., 2021). Sacred water rituals cleanse the body and purify the mind and soul, preparing individuals for spiritual worship and divine communion (Kidpromma, 2022). Moreover, the research reveals how these rituals facilitate interfaith dialogue and foster cultural syncretism in Indonesian society (Hambali et al., 2019; Kidpromma, 2022). Despite the distinct religious traditions of Islam and Buddhism, the coexistence of sacred water rites within the precincts of the Great Mosque of Old Banten and Avalokitesvara Vihara exemplifies the harmonious blending of diverse cultural and religious influences (Widiyanto, 2014). The presence of sacred water rituals at Avalokitesvara Vihara and the Great Mosque of Old Banten is a testament to Indonesia's rich religious and cultural heritage (Tahara et al., 2023). While these sites are rooted in different religious traditions – Buddhism and Islam, respectively – they share common ground in their reverence for water as a symbol of purification, healing, and spiritual connection (Ioffe, 2021; Mukhopadhyay & Choudry, 2020)

The coexistence of sacred water rituals within these religious precincts reflects the spirit of tolerance and acceptance that pervades Indonesian society. Rather than seeing their religious differences as barriers, practitioners at the Great Mosque of Old Banten and Avalokitesvara Vihara embrace the opportunity for cultural exchange and mutual enrichment (Tatay, 2021). Visitors of various faiths are welcome to participate in the rituals and ceremonies, fostering a sense of inclusivity and unity among diverse religious communities (Ioffe, 2021). Furthermore, the shared use of sacred water rites provides a platform for interfaith dialogue and cooperation. Religious leaders, scholars, and practitioners from Buddhist and Islamic traditions come together to discuss the significance of water in their respective faiths, exchange insights, and

explore commonalities. Through these dialogues, participants deepen their understanding of each other's beliefs and build bridges of understanding and respect (Faisal et al., 2022).

The harmonious blending of diverse cultural and religious influences at the Great Mosque of Old Banten and Avalokitesvara Vihara exemplifies the syncretic nature of Indonesian society. Rather than adhering rigidly to separate religious identities, Indonesians embrace the fluidity and adaptability of their religious practices, drawing inspiration from multiple traditions to enrich their spiritual lives (Hudaeri et al., 2020). Moreover, the coexistence of sacred water rituals promotes cultural syncretism, where elements of Hindu, Buddhist, and indigenous traditions merge with Islamic practices. This syncretism is evident in the rituals, which often incorporate symbols, gestures, and prayers from multiple religious traditions. Indonesians create a unique religious and cultural identity through these blended practices that reflect the country's diverse heritage and history (Ioffe, 2021; Lensink, 2021).

The coexistence of sacred water rituals at the Great Mosque of Old Banten and Avalokitesvara Vihara highlights Indonesian society's inclusive and harmonious nature (Adhika & Putra, 2021). By embracing diversity and fostering interfaith dialogue, these holy sites serve as beacons of tolerance, understanding, and cultural syncretism. They exemplify Indonesia's commitment to unity in diversity and offer valuable lessons for promoting peace and harmony in a multicultural world (Turner, 2007).

Role of Sacred Sites in Nurturing Religious Tolerance

The pivotal role of the Great Mosque of Old Banten and Avalokitesvara Vihara in nurturing religious tolerance and facilitating cross-cultural interaction in Indonesian society cannot be overstated (Widayat & Prameswari, 2022). These sacred sites symbolize Indonesia's religious diversity and cultural resilience, fostering mutual understanding and harmony among believers of different faith traditions (Ihsan & Fatah, 2021). The Great Mosque of Old Banten and Avalokitesvara Vihara embody Indonesia's pluralistic society, where diverse religious communities coexist and interact peacefully (Rohman & Muhtamiroh, 2022). The presence of Zam-zam water at The Great Mosque of Old Banten and the central fountain at Avalokitesvara Vihara reflects the inclusive nature of these religious sites, welcoming visitors of all faiths to partake in sacred water rituals and spiritual practices (Al-Ajarma, 2022). These sacred sites promote religious tolerance and understanding among Indonesians through their open-door policies and inclusive practices. Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, and followers of indigenous beliefs converge at the Great Mosque of Old Banten and Avalokitesvara Vihara to participate in rituals, ceremonies, and cultural events, fostering a sense of unity and respect for religious diversity (Rohman & Muhtamiroh, 2022).

Moreover, the Great Mosque of Old Banten and Avalokitesvara Vihara serve as platforms for interfaith dialogue and cooperation. Religious leaders, scholars, and practitioners from different faith traditions exchange ideas, share experiences, and promote mutual respect. By engaging in constructive dialogue, they seek common ground and celebrate shared values, strengthening social cohesion and harmony in Indonesian society (Hambali et al., 2019). These sacred sites also play a vital role in educating the public about religious pluralism and tolerance. Through guided tours, educational programs, and outreach initiatives, they raise awareness about respecting diverse religious beliefs and fostering interreligious understanding. By providing opportunities for learning and interaction, they empower individuals to challenge

stereotypes, combat prejudice, and build bridges across religious divides (Kurniawan et al., 2022). Furthermore, the Great Mosque of Old Banten and Avalokitesvara Vihara are models of peaceful coexistence and cultural exchange in Indonesian society. Visitors from all walks of life come to these sites to experience the beauty of Indonesia's religious heritage and to witness firsthand the power of unity in diversity. Their architectural splendor, sacred rituals, and cultural festivities inspire admiration and reverence for Indonesia's multicultural identity (Qolyubi et al., 2021).

The enduring relevance of sacred water rituals in Indonesia underscores their importance in shaping the country's spiritual, social, and cultural landscape. By embracing religious syncretism and diversity, these rituals transcend sectarian divides, fostering a sense of unity and belonging among Indonesians of all backgrounds. As Indonesia continues to navigate the complexities of contemporary society, sacred water rituals remain a powerful force for spiritual renewal, communal solidarity, and cultural resilience.

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, the profound significance and enduring enigma surrounding sacred water rituals at the Great Mosque of Old Banten and Avalokitesvara Vihara reflect the rich tapestry of Indonesian religious traditions. This study unveils the intricate layers of meaning embedded within these rituals through a multifaceted methodological approach encompassing participant observation, historical analysis, ethnographic research, and in-depth interviews. The historical evolution of sacred water rites, their cultural origins and contextual significance, and their multifunctional nature across religious communities underscore the complex interplay between spirituality, culture, and religion in Indonesia. Moreover, the pivotal role of these sacred sites in nurturing religious tolerance and facilitating cross-cultural interaction highlights their significance in promoting harmony and understanding in Indonesian society.

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